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Review of Lynne E. Baab's "Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond our Appetites"

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Lynne A. BAAB, *Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond Our Appetites*. Downers Grove IL: IVP Books, 2006. pp. 151. \$13 pb. ISBN-10: 0-8308-3501-6. \$22.00. Reviewed by Jason Paul BOURGEOIS.

This little book on fasting is written in an informal style, with plenty of aids such as sidebar quotes and discussion questions to help the general reader understand and engage the material. Baab comes from an evangelical Christian background, and draws upon her own experience of fasting as well as the stories of others to illustrate her points.

The primary purpose of the book is to convince believing Christians that the practice of fasting has value. Baab gives several reasons for this: it is a meaningful sacrifice that enables us to be closer to God, it deepens our prayer life and enables us to listen better to God, it counteracts the cultural emphasis on instant gratification, it helps us to be grateful for what we have, and to remember those who do not have what they need.

To provide a background for the practice of fasting, Baab examines several Scriptural passages in which this practice is described, and also traces the practice of fasting in historical Christianity. In this context, she offers an interesting and positive examination of the Eastern Orthodox practice of fasting. In examining medieval Catholic Christianity, she warns against an attitude of fasting that suggests self-hatred or punishment of the body.

When treating the question of fasting from food, Baab looks at the different types of fasts used: partial fasting (sometimes called abstinence) in which a particular food is given up, juice/water fasting (with a detailed examination of the physical process of ketosis that occurs from prolonged water fasts), and complete fasting (no food or water). She offers practical suggestions for conducting each type of fast.

She also offers interesting reflections, based on her own experience, on how to distinguish between fasting (for a spiritual purpose) and dieting (to improve self-image). These reflections show a special sensitivity to women's issues regarding food and body image in North American culture.

Furthermore, Baab looks at the very interesting question of fasting from other things than food, such as television, Internet, mindless novels, excessive social interaction, etc. Refraining from these things for a time can free a person from distractions that keep them from hearing the voice of God. Sometimes they can result in a permanent lifestyle change or can break a compulsion or addiction.

Baab concludes the book by looking at communal fasting, whether that occurs among couples, families (and she includes practical suggestions for teaching children about fasting), or congregations. The stories of fasting that she recounts, both of individuals and of communities, suggest that fasting should be done for a spiritual purpose, sometimes even for a specific prayer intention. Fasting, along with keeping the Sabbath (a topic addressed by Baab in a previous book), gives rhythm to the Christian life and helps maintain spiritual balance and awareness.

The book is appropriate for a general audience, and will resonate especially with those of an evangelical Christian background. It is interesting and useful for anyone who wishes to understand the value of the practice of fasting in the Christian tradition.